DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 475 HE 036 192

TITLE	Looking for Student Aid: Federal, State, and Other Sources of Information.
INSTITUTION	Office of Federal Student Aid (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	6p.; For a more detailed version, see http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/LSA. For the Spanish version, see HE 036 191.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/finallook_stdnt_aid.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Applicants; Federal Aid; *Higher Education; *Scholarships; State Aid; *Student Financial Aid
IDENTIFIERS	Student Search Service

ABSTRACT

This brochure contains information about finding federal, state, and other sources of information about student financial aid for college. The brochure advises that most of the information private college scholarship search companies provide can be obtained for free elsewhere. Students should ensure that they are not paying for free information, and that if they decide to use a private company, they know what they are getting for their money. This guide suggests some places the college applicant can look for information about financial aid, highlighting federal and state government sources and some private sources of free information. (SLD)

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Looking for Student Aid

Fuentes de información federal, estatal y otros recursos

ED 480 475

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Should I pay someone to help me find or apply for financial aid?

The quick answer is: Free help is available—whether you're looking for sources of student

What if Im still curious about private scholarship search companies?

A number of privately operated scholarship search companies charge fees that can range from $50 to well over $1,000. Listed below are some of the services you might expect from a private company.

- Most scholarship search companies provide a list of sources of financial assistance for which you may apply. After studying the list, you then send a separate application to each source that interests you.
- Many search companies offer to refund your fee if you do not receive any award. However, some services require you to provide a rejection letter from every source on the list to claim your refund. You should be aware that many scholarship sources do not routinely send rejection letters.

What are some questionable tactics I should watch out for?

- **Some companies will tell you that millions of dollars in student aid go unclaimed every year.** These statistics represent an estimated national total of employee benefits or member benefits. Usually, such benefits are available only to the employees (and their families) of a specific company, or to the members of a specific union or other organization.
- **Some claim that you can't get the same information anywhere else.** Remember that you can find out

What if I want more detailed information about federal student aid?

Free materials available in the financial aid office at your college or career school or the guidance office at your high school include the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) as well as *The Student Guide* and *Funding Your Education*, two booklets that provide detailed information about the U.S. Department of Education's programs. You also may request copies of the FAFSA or either of the two booklets by calling the Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC) toll free at the number shown on the back panel of this brochure. The FSAIC's operators can answer your questions about federal student aid and the application process.

You may apply for federal student aid at no cost by filing a paper FAFSA or applying electronically with *FAFSA on the Web*, the online application for federal student aid. All you need for *FAFSA on the Web* is a computer that supports a Department-approved browser. *FAFSA on the Web* is at **www.fafsa.ed.gov**

There are Web sites at which students can get help filing the FAFSA for a fee. These sites are not affiliated with or endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education. We urge you not to pay these sites for assistance that is provided for free elsewhere. You can get free help from the FSAIC, from the financial aid administrator at your college, from *FAFSA on the Web's* online help, or from a U.S. Department of Education online guide called *Completing the FAFSA* at **www.studentaid.ed.gov/completefafsa**

You may visit the Department of Education's student aid Web site to view Department publications online or to learn more about the Department's programs at **www.studentaid.ed.gov**

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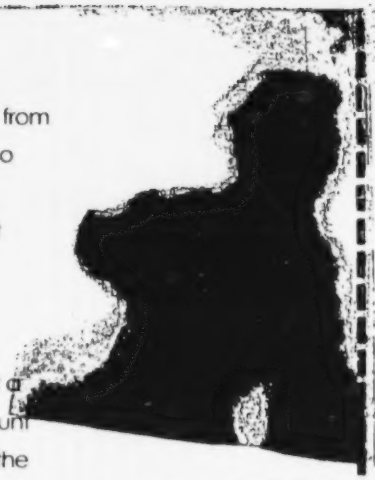
about student aid for free from one of the sources listed to the right.



- **Others request your credit card or bank account number to hold student financial aid for you.** You should never give out a credit card or bank account number unless you know the company or organization you are giving it to is legitimate.
- **Others try to get you to send them money by claiming that you are a finalist in a scholarship contest.** Most sources of financial aid have application deadlines and eligibility criteria; they do not, generally, operate like a sweepstakes.
- **Scholarship seminars frequently end with one-on-one meetings in which a salesperson pressures the student to "buy now or lose out on this opportunity."** Legitimate services don't use such pressure tactics.

The U.S. Department of Education does not evaluate private scholarship search companies. Before you decide to use one of these services, check its reputation by contacting the Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.com), a school guidance counselor, or a state attorney general's office. Additionally, investigate the organization yourself before making a commitment.

- Ask for names of three or four local families who have used its services recently.
- Ask how many students have used its services and how many of them received scholarships as a result.
- Find out about the company's refund policy.
- Get everything in writing.
- Read all the fine print before signing anything.

Where can I get FREE information about student aid?

You should look for information about aid from the federal government, your state government, your local community and private sources.

✓ Checklist of Free Sources of Student Aid Information

the financial aid office at your college or career school — be sure to ask about "institutional aid" (funds from the school itself)

a high school counselor

the U.S. Department of Education — call **1-800-4-FED-AID** or visit **www.studentaid.ed.gov**

other federal agencies (including the military, if appropriate) — visit **www.students.gov**

your state education agency — check the phone book for the number or visit **www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SHEA.htm**

the reference section of your school or public library

the Internet — search using the key words "student aid" or "financial aid" — but remember that some scams operate online

foundations, religious organizations, community organizations, local businesses and civic groups

organizations (including professional associations) related to your field of interest

ethnicity-based organizations

your employer or your parents' employers

free scholarship search services

Check with all of these sources before considering paying for a scholarship search or other financial aid service.

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aid or completing the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA). If theres a fee involved be sure you know what youre paying for.

For more information about scholarship scams or to report a scam, call the Federal Trade Commission toll free at: 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) or go to

www.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams

Most of the information private scholarship search companies provide can be obtained for free elsewhere. Before you pay any company or organization to find student financial aid for you, make sure you're not paying for free information. Also make sure you know what you're getting for your money. Searching for student aid on your own can prevent you from wasting your money. You just need to know where to look.

View a more detailed version of this brochure online at:
www.studentaid.ed.gov/LSA

Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC)

1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)

(TTY 1-800-730-8913)

www.studentaid.ed.gov

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